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A

MEMORIAL SERMON

ON THE

Death of General Ulysses S. Grant,

DELIVERED BY THE PASTOR,

Rev. Dr. Byron Sunderland,

IN THE

First Presbyterian Church,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

SABBATH MORNING, JULY 26, 1885.

WASHINGTON:
LAMBERT & PIGOTT, PRINTERS,
Norris Building, 501 F Street,
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NOTE.—This simple discourse, the humble tribute of one whose ministrations the illustrious General, mourned to-day throughout the civilized world, at one time attended—was prepared in a round of daily duties, and delivered on this first opportunity occuring after the decease.

It is now published by the kindness of the author's generous friend, Mr. JAMES L. NORRIS, whose ever noble nature responds to the universal sentiment of grief which fills the Nation, and whose willing hand offers to the disconsolate family this expression of heartfelt sympathy.

B. SUNDERLAND.

H.A.S. Dec. 16, 1913.

THE DEATH OF GRANT,

AT

Mt. McGregor, July 23, 1885. Morning, 8:8.

Second Chron., 35, 24. * * * *And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.*

This man was one of the best of the kings of Judah. At his death there was lamentation in all the land. Thousands of years pass away, and far off from the scene of that ancient mourning, a powerful people in their magnificent home under the setting sun are cast down by the death of their great countryman.

The thought which fills all hearts at this moment is—*General Grant is no more.*

He once sat with us in these seats. At the time the canvass for his Presidency was going on, he, with his now stricken family, was a regular attendant upon our Sabbath services, and joined in the worship offered at this altar. None who saw him as he was with us then can ever forget the devout attention of his grave and thoughtful manner. We cannot pass over it to-day in silence.

When the Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, of England, died, the impassioned funeral preacher, at the beginning of his discourse, exclaimed: "God only is great."

And so now, amid the universal gloom of the Nation and the civilized world, we lie prone in our sorrow, and are forced to cry out, "God only is great!"

When we recall the words of Prospero—

> "These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits,
> And are melted into air—into thin air,—
> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples—the great globe itself;
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made of, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep!"—

We must cry out again, "God only is great!"

Yet the man we mourn to-day is one of the few, that touch all the higher chords of human nature; whose departure makes the heart sad in every quarter of the globe—

> "One of the few, the immortal names,
> That were not born to die!"

No wonder that while awaiting the final obsequies the great cities of the land should contend for his place of sepulture.

Henry Melville said: "It is not a Christian thing to manifest indifference as to where our bodies shall be laid. I would be chimed to my rest by my own village-bell, and have my requiem sung where I was baptized into Christ."

Long before, the dying request of the patriarch, far off in the land of strangers, gave expression to this sentiment in words so simple and so touching that we never can read them but with deepest emotion—

"Bury me in the cave of Machpelah before Mamre in

Hebron; there they buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca, his wife; and there I buried Leah!"

But where shall be the machpelah of the man whose family is our Nation and whose home is the whole land which gave him birth? To us it seems most fitting that he should slumber here amid the people who knew him best—under the shadow of the Nation's proudest monuments—in the very capital which he did so much to prosper and adorn.

Contention for the honor of the birth-place or the sepulchre of a man who has been foremost in affecting the fortunes of mankind has been a feature of human, and, may we not add, of laudable ambition, form the earliest times. Seven cities claimed the birth-place of Homer. Seven competitors raised tombs above the bones of Gautama.

The great but sad Napoleon, like a caged eagle, dying in his far off island prison, made this pathetic request: "Let my ashes be interred on the banks of the Seine; let my dust repose among the people I loved so well!" On the 8th of May, 1821, his remains were buried under some weeping willows near a fountain in Slane's valley. Twenty years afterward they were borne to France where they now repose beneath a magnificent monument in the "*Hotel des Invalides.*" But neither Josephine nor Maria ~~Theresa~~ Louisa is lying by his side. It will not be so with our great General. He has made sure that she, who has been so lovely to him in their life, shall not be divided from him in their death.

This is no time nor place, and I am not the man to attempt to discuss the life and influence, or even to tell the story of the hero who lies so pulseless to-day in the shadowed and sacred cottage on Mt. McGregor—

> "He sleeps his last sleep,
> He has fought his last battle,
> No sound shall awake him to glory again."

But there is one comfort in the thought that he, a soldier, the head of great armies, exposed so often to the death-storm, which swept away from his side so many of his comrades, was permitted, like Washington, to die in his own bed surrounded by his wife and children, his physicians and his pastor. Alexander died in old Babylon amid the fogs of the marshes and the scenes of revelry and debauch which hastened his dissolution. Cæsar fell in the Roman state-house, at the foot of Pompey's pillar—stabbed to death by the bloody hands of Brutus and his associates. Marlborough died at Windsor Lodge, smitten of palsy. Wellington died of apoplexy at Walmer Castle. Lincoln and Garfield were sped to death by the assassin's bullet in our own gracious city—but Grant lies down to the dreamless sleep, after long, patient, heroic, Christain suffering indeed, amid all the touching endearments of family and fond friends in that mountain cottage, in the pure and peaceful air of almost virgin Nature, in a region of the Empire State full of historic interest, near by the famous waters of Saratoga; that mountain cottage which henceforth shall become the sacred shrine of the Nation's proud but weeping memories.

Was General Grant a Christian believer? Did he trust in Christ as his own and only Saviour and Redeemer? On these questions many hearts will ponder with deep and unfeigned interest. In these Christian times the apotheosis of a great man is far different from that of the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is fitting to pay respect and veneration to the memory of the illustrious deeds of the Patriot, the Philanthropist, and the Benefactor; but no real Christian can forget that the noblest and the grandest of the human race belong to a fallen and sinful order, and, like the humblest and most erring of the sons of men, have need of that salvation which is provided only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think that General Grant was impressed with a profound

conviction of this momentous doctrine. But he was "a silent man"—a man of deeds rather than of words. There was, moreover, an inner temple of his mind where his most sacred thoughts of God and eternal things were kept from curious public observation. During his residence in this city he was deeply interested, both as an auditor and as an officer, in the affairs of the churches he attended. He was an earnest listener to the doctrines and duties of a Christian life while he occupied a seat in our Sanctuary, and when he left us for his own Church he was made a trustee of the new and active Organization, and there, in the noble edifice near by us, for eight years he was found among the most regular and earnest attendants. In all his private conversation he was singularly free from unbecoming language. In all his public utterances he recognized and expressed his deep conviction of the overruling Providence of God, and his profound reverence for the Christian religion.

During his residence in New York he carried out the same devotion, and in the last long, painful illness he had with him by his very bed-side his intimate, trusted, and honored pastor, who, as I am informed and believe, at the request of General Grant led their daily family devotions. What more may have passed between them, which would indicate what we all desire so much to know, remains to be told by him, who has been intrusted by the illustrious dead to bear his religious testimony to the world.

And on this topic—at a most solemn moment in the experience of the Nation—I will not forbear to avow what I have many times repeated on other occasions, namely, that no more essential or important duty belongs to our public men than making a public profession of their Christian faith through the solemn ordinances of the Christian Church. The value of such testimony, given in such a manner, to the cotemporary and coming generations is simply priceless. If men believe in

Christ let them have the candor and courage to confess it, and that in the most solemn forms which the rites of the Christian Church impose. It is not good to postpone this profession, against all the chances of sudden death; for while a man may count on the Divine compassion to the last moment, he ought not to hazard the opportunity of leaving behind him the most positive evidence he can ever give of his peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. That General Grant had this peace and this faith in his final days we all expect to hear.

The circumstances of his illness and death in this respect are widely different from those which arose around the dying couch of his great predecessor in the Presidential office, Abraham Lincoln, who was smitten senseless in an instant; and of his successor, President Garfield, who was three months dying, without any known or reported conversation with any minister of the gospel save that which transpired at the depot where he was stricken down. There are some strange, unwritten incidents in both these cases which cast a thrilling light upon the dealings of the Almighty with those whom He has lifted into positions of vast honor, power, and responsibility!

There is another thing which comes home to us in connection with the death of General Grant, and to which as a people we have not been heretofore altogether strangers—I mean the universal outburst of all the most sacred sympathies of which humanity is susceptible. There have been times in our national history when party bitterness and unseemly feuds have deeply prejudiced the fair fame of the Republic. There are wounds and rents in the hearts of the people which it seems there are no needles of Providence to knit up again like that of a common sorrow. In the past, on two eminent occasions, this needle of national grief has knit together the ravelled robe of our national unity, and made it stronger than ever. There has now come another, to show us what we are frequently apt to forget,

that we are all Americans. The personal and family adversities of the last year or two, the painful illness borne so bravely, are not without meaning to the thoughtful student of Providence. The work of his life was ended; it was time for him to die. While a revolution of popular sentiment had clothed a new man with the vast power of the Government which once his hand had wielded, there is no more pathetic thing in these recent months and days than the last act of the expiring Congress and the first act of the new Chief Magistrate in restoring the dying General to his place on the roll of martial honor—and this to be followed so swiftly by those fitting and tender words which went forth from the Executive Mansion but the other day to the widowed heart of her who sits in her desolation receiving with her fatherless children the great volume of condolence which surges around her from every quarter. This private message, this public proclamation of the President, will be embalmed in the memory of men, and go down to posterity with the name of the great General whose demise has called it forth. It is the voice of the Nation itself, so touching and so tender, which shows for all time and to all people the reality of our fraternity and the value of our common heritage!

General Grant was permitted before his eyes were closed in death, like Moses overlooking the land of promise, to see for himself the returning tide of national good-will and growing confidence. His grand heart had longed for Peace, and he saw her coming truly in her beauty and her might. The asperities of the past were vanishing away. The hostilities that kept men apart were yielding to the gentle but most potent influences of a day of better feeling. Towards himself and his dear ones he felt the grateful sympathy of the whole Nation beating with the spirit of loving veneration. On all this fair vision, on all this new outbreak of appreciation which stirred even his own pulses

with a vigor which, alas! has proved so brief, he was privileged to look with a calm satisfaction.

The day of his death calls forth a Nation's grief. It is one lamentation without a discordant tone. Human imperfections are all forgotten. The mistakes, the errors, the follies of a lifetime sink into oblivion before the sublime and awe-inspiring anthem of a proud people's sorrow—before the matchless death-march of a mighty Nation bearing him to his grave!

The great lesson of this far-reaching event is that which the pen of inspiration wrote out for all the world to read and ponder, thousands of years ago—"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting."

The words which concluded Lincoln's first inaugural address, come back to us to-day with chastening, melting, unifying energy.

"The mystic cords of memory," he said, "stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as they surely will be, by the better angels of our nature!"

How prophetic to-day sounds this sentence which he himself and thousands of others sealed with their blood? Already the swift speeding years have told off to the Nation the mighty roster of the illustrious dead. How many times have the cities been covered with the dark emblems of mourning? How many times has the air been laden with voices of grief in the people's recurring lamentation? The mourning of Judah and Jerusalem is dwarfed beside the sorrow which has come to the Republic over the burial of her great actors and her noble sons, while out of the dust and dissolution, out of the tears and heart-aches of weeping mothers and disconsolate children have sprung up those sublime sympathies which give in the North, in the

South, in East and West new coherence and ornament to society and civilization !

Ah, how true it is, that beneath the shadows of the sepulchre the nation's heart is purified, and graces come into our private and public life, which light it up with an immortal beauty, and fill it with a radiance descended from the skies. So the pilgrim angel of human Grief treads silently in human habitations, and makes every heart sacred which the finger of God has touched. Oh, pilgrim angel of human Grief, white-haired and bent with the long travel of the ages, thou hast kindled new hope in the breast of patriarchs and prophets, priests and kings : thou hast softened the harshness of human nature ; thou hast trodden over all the hills of Time, and where the desert wastes looked dreary thou hast blown the blossom and infloresence of a fairer vision and a grander life !

Out of this mighty touch of the grief we feel to-day may the flower and fruitage of faith in God, of trust in Christ, of grace by the Holy Ghost, of fellowship with man, of noble purpose and aspiring aim, come forth abundantly to bless our country and the world !—AMEN.

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